

## Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, September 29, 1896, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Beinn Bhreagh, C. B.

Tuesday, September 29, 1896. My darling little wife:

I have had to water my ink and hope this letter — or rather these disjointed notes — will prove to be legible.

Just received your welcome note with enclosure for Mr. Kennan which I have forwarded to him. A library without a reading-room is an anomaly. I hope Gertrude Hall will be utilized in this way.

I am very much troubled about Elsie — and have observed all during the summer that her nervous system has been much affected — and I feel pretty sure that the cause has been too much excitement. There has been so much going on all the time. I am very fearful of the effects of “Coming out” in Washington — and feel that we ought to seek some advice from a specialist.

Dr. Kinnicut is all very well in his way — but Dr. Weir Witchell is of course the man to go to. I would certainly like Dr. Mitchell to see her, and report upon her condition.

Letter for you has come from Daisy which I have opened and now forward s with this. A delightful girlish epistle giving full details of her journey — and of her first impressions of her new school.

Mr. Harrington came to see Mr. McCurdy yesterday — profuse in his oily talk —. Believed he would get oil from 2 Mr. McCurdy's well if he went down far enough — great promise and etc., etc. — and — and — and — wanted two hundred dollars on account!

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Today there seems to have been an undoubted oily appearance on the water that came from the well. They have pierced the hard limestone rock and have reached a dark looking — softer — sandstone rock. Harrington is wild over it — His predictions of 20 years standing — are about to be fulfilled etc., etc.

This is the “first porous sandstone” that is always found before striking oil and etc., “Downward still downward” is the cry. Mr. McCurdy visited the well today and reports an undoubted oily scum on issuing water. He also brought home with him a specimen of the sand brought up from the bottom. He placed this in water — and in a little while an oily scum appeared upon the water. This may prove to be an important discovery; but unfortunately I am very doubtful of the man ; and taken in connection with his remarks to Mr. McCurdy yesterday (before any trace of oil was discovered) and his desire to have Mr. McCurdy go on boring for oil — now that the object of the artesian well has been accomplished (namely water) and the fact that the artesian well at Lake Ainslie with which he was connected — was oiled artificially. All these facts leads me to suspect a grain of salt somewhere!

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However, I have no doubt in my own mind, that oil does exist here somewhere; and Mr. McCurdy's may for ought I know be the pioneer well. I only wish I felt as much confidence in the man, Harrington, as I do in the existence of oil in Cape Breton. He may be all right — and I hope he is. All enthusiasts are apt to acquire the character of cranks — and of course he has acquired this character long ago. Still I believe he is right in the faith he holds — and I would like to help in finding the first oil — though I wouldn't care to invest in it — even if found. Mr. McCurdy is quite excited over his sand — and I hope he won't be disappointed. I intend to go over tomorrow and have a look at the well with him. If Mr. Harrington is a man who would be above doctoring the well to get Mr. McCurdy to put more money in it — it really looks as if we wrer on the cave of a discovery.

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The fact seems to be that minute quantities of oil came out of the well today.

The question in my mind is — was it put there for a purpose? Time will show, and I will watch the matter in your father's interest.

If it were not for that unfortunate Lake Ainslie “fake” with which Harrington's name is associated, and for the man's remarks yesterday to Mr. McCurdy preparing a request for money — with the subsequent sudden appearance of oil on the top of his words — I should be as excited 4 as Mr. McCurdy — for I can see what the discovery would mean for Buddeck and for the country. Will report later the results of my observations upon the spot.

Interesting article on “The salt and gas wells of China” in Chambers' Journal. The author saw a young man at work with very primitive means boring a deep well in the gas and salt region, and asked him how long he had been at work. Imagine his surprise to find that the boring had been commenced by the man's grandfather! His father also had labored at it for many years — and bequeathed the work to him. There had been continuous boring for seventy years! — by three generations of workers! — and the gas stratum had not yet been reached. The certainty of a (Chinese) fortune awaited the man who should strike that stratum — and after seventy years the grandson of the original prospector was nearing the critical place. The ultimate result was a certainty — for thousands of wells were in successful operation all round — and some of them were referred to in a work believed to be two thousand years old.

Have just read with much interest, the address of Sir Joseph Lister before the British Association for the Advancement of Science. See Science for September 25, 1896. Head it.

Must go on with my night work now.

With much love to you and Elsie.

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Your loving husband, Alec.

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P. S. I send Daisy's letter to Washington — so that it any be sure to reach you. AGB. Mrs.  
A. Graham Bell, Parker House, Boston, Mass.